



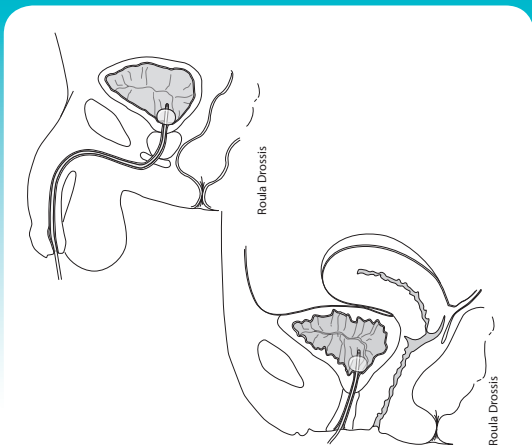
Urethral catheter care

Taking proper care of your urethral catheter will make you feel more comfortable and help prevent problems.

What is a urethral catheter?

- When your bladder cannot empty by itself, urine can back up.
- A **urethral catheter** is a narrow, flexible tube that is put into your urethra to help empty your bladder.
- Many catheters have a small balloon on the tip of the catheter that is inflated with water to keep it from slipping out. (See diagram: *Male and female lower urinary tract*.)
- This build-up of urine may be caused by:
 - A blocked urethra (for example from an enlarged prostate in men)
 - A weak bladder muscle
 - Certain surgeries
 - Serious injury to that area
- If urine continues to fill up in the bladder:
 - You may feel pain
 - Your kidneys could be damaged
- Your doctor will decide on the type, material, and size of the catheter based on what you need.
- Usually, you will find that a narrower catheter is less irritating.

Male and female lower urinary tract



Are there different kinds of urethral catheters?

- An **indwelling catheter (urethral catheter or suprapubic catheter)** stays inside the body to help drain urine from your bladder.

Urethral catheter

- Is used for a short time (several days or weeks) with a drainage bag
- Can measure how much urine you pass
- Can be used when your urine is leaking (called incontinence) and causing skin problems.
- Is taken out when you are able to urinate on your own
- Is deflated and taken out using a tool to take the water out of the balloon. (See diagram: *Male and female lower urinary tract*.)
- Sometimes, it may be necessary to keep the catheter in longer, even permanently.

Suprapubic catheter

- Does not need to be put into your urethra
- Goes into your bladder through a small cut (incision) in your lower abdomen
- Connects directly to a drainage bag
- May be easier to keep clean than a urethral (internal) catheter

Clean intermittent self-catheterization (CIC)

- In some cases, you may have a catheter that you can learn to put into your urethra yourself.
- Once you have used it to empty your bladder, you take the catheter out.
- CIC is less likely to cause an infection than an indwelling catheter.

What will happen with an in-dwelling catheter?

- An in-dwelling catheter drains urine continuously into a drainage bag.
- When the bag fills up, you can empty it right into the toilet.

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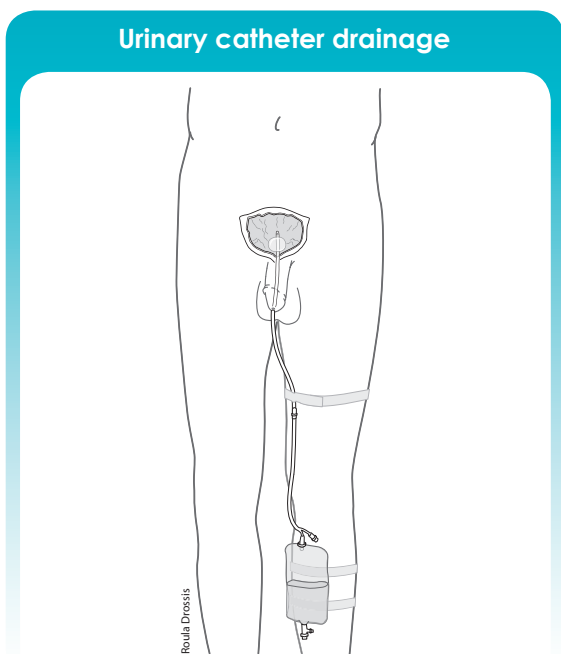
- If you are active during the day, you may prefer to use a smaller bag.
- At bedtime, you can use a bigger drainage bag to hold more urine.
- You can hang the bedtime bag by your bed or place it on the floor.
- You will learn how to attach your bags to your catheter and empty them.
- You may find it difficult to have sexual intercourse if you have an in-dwelling catheter.

What is helpful to know about having a catheter?

- Most of the urine should drain through the inside of the catheter.
- Sometimes, urine may leak beside the catheter, especially when you have a bowel movement (because of the “pushing”)
- It is important not to get constipated.
 - If you do get constipated, use a mild laxative or stool softener such as docusate (Colace™).
- If there is a lot of leaking, your catheter may be blocked or “kinked” (like a garden hose).

What do I need to know about having a drainage bag?

- If you have a drainage bag, you should tie it to your leg (called a leg bag) with a Velcro strap. (See diagram: *Urinary catheter drainage*.)
 - Strapping the bag will stop it from pulling on your urethra opening and irritating it.
 - The bag can be hidden under clothing.



- Places selling medical supplies will have Velcro straps for your bag.
- It is important not to make the catheter and leg straps too tight.
- The drainage bag needs to be below the level of the bladder so that urine doesn't back up.
- Empty your catheter bag at least every 8 hours or when the bag becomes full.
- The catheter can collect waste where it comes out of the urethra.
- When you empty your drainage bag you may need to:
 - Measure the amount of your urine into a cup (in milliliters or ounces)
 - Write down the time you emptied the bag.
- It is important to drink plenty of fluids.
- Your urine should be pale yellow or clear in colour.
- If your urine is dark, you need to drink more fluid.

How do I take care of a catheter and drainage bag?

- It is important to keep everything clean to avoid infection.
 - Wash your hands before and after emptying or changing your bag.
 - When you change a bag, use alcohol wipes to clean the places where the catheter and bag join.
 - Use a clean washcloth, soap, and water daily to wash this area and about 5 cm (2 inches) up the catheter.
 - Dry with a clean towel.
- You may shower when you have a catheter, but avoid soaking in water (such as bathing, hot tubs, swimming).

What do I need to know about a long-term catheter and drainage bag?

- A long-term catheter should be changed about once a month.
- You can clean the catheter drainage bag(s) and tubing at least once a week by washing in warm water and dish soap.
- Rinse fully with water, then leave the bag to air-dry with the outlet valve open.
- Every once in a while, you will need to soak the drainage bag(s) and tubing:
 - In half-strength **white** vinegar or bleach to stop bacteria from growing
 - For 20 minutes per time

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- Store your bag in a clean plastic bag (like a Ziploc™ bag).
- Replace any damaged or cracked tubing or drainage bags.

What problems could I have with a catheter?

- It is important to make sure that you can urinate easily through your catheter.

Catheter obstruction

- Happens if waste or blood block the catheter
- Can also be caused by a “kink” in the tube (like a garden hose)
- Can cause bladder discomfort, although this should go away when your catheter is unplugged.
- If plugging happens often, your catheter may need to be flushed out with water.
- May create **stones** in the bladder over time (hardened lumps of material) if the waste build-up is not removed.

Bladder spasms

- A catheter may mildly irritate your bladder and urethra.
- You may feel as if you need to urinate often and “instantly.”
- Spasms can happen if the bladder squeezes around the catheter balloon.
- These spasms may cause urine to leak out around the catheter.
- If bladder spasms happen often, there is medication to help.

Irritation of the urethral opening

- A catheter can cause a number of problems (soreness or pain; redness; swelling; raw areas; or the skin breaking down around the urethra).
- This can be reduced by cleaning daily
- This can be reduced if the catheter does not pull on the opening.
- A small amount of antibacterial ointment (such as Polysporin™) may help by keeping the area lubricated and clean.

Bloody urine

- A catheter in your bladder can irritate the bladder lining and urethra.
- Sometimes you may see blood in your urine.
- Pulling on the catheter can also cause bleeding.
- If you have blood in your urine,
 - Make sure that your catheter is firmly in place
 - Drink more fluids
 - Be less vigorously active
 - **See your doctor right away** if blood in the urine is heavy or lasts for more than three days.

Infection

- If your catheter is left in for more than a few days, you may end up with bacteria in your urine.
- Bacteria in the urine does not need to be treated with antibiotics unless you have symptoms of an infection.
- Symptoms of infection are fever, sweats and/or chills.
- Infections may also cause you to feel very tired or confused.
- These symptoms may be a sign that you need immediate medical help and antibiotics.
- If you drink plenty of fluids and keep the area clean, you will reduce your risk of infection.

Contact your doctor or home care provider if you have:

- Fever (over 37.8°C or 100°F), chills or sweats
- On-going blood in your urine or blood clots
- Discomfort, redness and/or swelling in your urethra that gets worse
- Your catheter accidentally comes out or is removed.
- Your catheter is not draining properly.

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